

Redwood Library  
50 Bellevue Avenue  
Newport  
Newport County  
Rhode Island

HABS No. RI-100

HABS  
RI,  
3-NEWP,  
15-

~~An addendum to~~  
Redwood Library  
Bellevue Avenue  
Newport County  
Newport  
Rhode Island  
in HABS CATALOG (1941)

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20240

## REDWOOD LIBRARY

HABS  
RI,  
3-NEWP,  
15-

Location: 50 Bellevue Avenue.

Present Owner: The Company of the Redwood Library.

Present Occupants: The Company of the Redwood Library.

Present Use: Library.

Statement of Significance: The Redwood Library is a notable specimen of the architectural taste of the early 18th century. As an important work of the architect Peter Harrison, it is a key building in the introduction of English Georgian architecture in America.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History:

## 1. Original and subsequent owners:

The building is located in Plat 25, Lots 90 and 99.

1748 Oeed of June 9, 1748, recorded in Land Evidence Book 34, p. 524. Newport City Clerk's Office.

From: Henry Collins

To: A. Redwood for the Company of the Redwood Library.

"This Indenture, made the ninth day of June in the twenty-first year of the Reign of his most sacred majesty George the Second, by the grace of God of Great Britain, France and Ireland, King, Defender of the faith: And in the year of our Lord, one thousand seven hundred and forty-eight, Between Henry Collins, of Newport, in the County of Newport, in the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, in New England in America, Merchant, of the one part, and Abraham Redwood, of the same Newport, Esqr., of the other part, Witnesseth that, Whereas the Hon'ble the Governor and Company of the Colony aforesaid being in General Assembly, met at Newport on the Third Tuesday in August last were graciously pleased to make and pass an Act whereby a number of Gentlemen therein named, and all others that should afterwards by them admitted members of their Company were constituted, created and made a Body

Politic and corporate to subsist at all times forever thereafter, in Deed and Name by the name of The Company of the Redwood Library, and by the same name to have perpetual succession, and be personable and taxable in Law; to have, hold, receive and enjoy Lands, Tenements, Rents, Liberties Franchises and Hereditaments in fee simple, or for term of Life, Lives, years or otherwise, etc., as, in and by the said Act and a Charter of Incorporation, granted in consequence thereof. Now the aforesaid Henry Collins, one of the members of the said incorporated Company, animated with zeal to carry the laudable design of the aforesaid Mr. Redwood the Founder, into execution, and for divers other good causes and considerations, him hereunto moving, as also for and in consideration of the sum of Five shillings lawful money of New England to him in hand paid, by the said Abraham Redwood, the receipt whereof to full content and satisfaction is hereby acknowledged, Hath Given, granted, bargained, sold, aliened, enfeoffed, conveyed and confirmed, and by these presents Doth Give, grant bargain, sell, aliene, enfeoffe, convey and confirm unto the said Abraham Redwood, his heirs and assigns forever, A certain piece or parcel of land, (being great part of the lot formerly called the Bowling Greene) lying and being in Newport aforesaid, measuring in front one hundred and forty feet and back or in depth one hundred and fifty feet, be the same more or less, Bounded Westerly on a Street or Highway, Northerly on land of John Easton, Easterly of land of Nicholas Easton, and Southerly of land of Jahleel Brenton, Together with the Reversion and Reversions, Remainder and Remainders thereof; And all the Estate, Right, Title and interest of him the said Henry Collins of in or to the premises and all and every the Appurtenances thereof; To have and to hold the premises hereby given, granted, bargained and sold, or mentioned or intended to be hereby given, granted bargained and sold unto him the said Abraham Redwood, his heirs and assigns forever (under the yearly rent of one peppercorn if demanded). To this End, meaning, Intent, Construction and purpose, to wit, that he the said Abraham Redwood, his heirs and assigns, shall henceforth and forever hereafter stand and be seized of the premises hereby given, granted, bargained and sold, or mentioned or intended to be hereby given, granted bargained and sold, To the only use, benefit and behoof of the aforesaid company of the Redwood Library, theirs heirs and assigns forever, And to no other use, intent or purpose whatsoever; and the said Henry Collins, for himself his heirs, executors and administrators, doth hereby covenant, promise and agree,

to and with the said Abraham Redwood, his heirs and assigns, and all other whom it doth or may concern, that he the said Henry Collins, his heirs, executors, administrators, and all and every other person and persons that by or under him shall hereafter lawfully have or claim any Estate, Right, Title, Interest, Property or demand, in, to, or out of the premises hereby given, granted, bargained and sold, or mentioned or intended to be hereby given, granted, bargained and sold, shall and will at any time hereafter upon the reasonable request, and at the proper cost and charges, in the Law or otherwise of the said Abraham Redwood, his heirs or assigns, or the Company aforesaid their heirs or assigns, make, do perform, acknowledge, levy, execute and suffer or cause to be made, done, performed, acknowledged, levied, executed and suffered all and every such farther, lawful and reasonable Act and Acts, Thing and Things, Devise and Devises, Assurance and conveyance in the Law as by learned council shall be advised, devised or contrived for the farther, better and more perfect assuring and conveying of all and singular the premises before given, granted bargained and sold or mentioned, or intended to be given, granted, bargained and sold, with all and every Rights, numbers, and Appurtenances thereof under him, the said Abraham Redwood, his heirs or assigns or the Company aforesaid, to and for the use and purpose aforesaid, and Furthermore the said Henry Collins, for himself, his heirs, executors, administrators, doth hereby covenant, promise, grant and agree to and with the said Abraham Redwood, his heirs and assigns, that he and they under the rent aforesaid, shall and may from time to time and at all times forever hereafter, lawfully peacefully and quietly have, hold, use, occupy, possess and enjoy the premises hereby given, granted bargained and said or mentioned, or intended to be hereby given, granted, bargained and sold, unto the sole proper use, benefit and behoof of the Company aforesaid, their heirs and successors forever, without the least Let, Molestation, Interruption, Trouble, Eviction, Ejection or Annoyance of the said Henry Collins, his heirs, Executors, Administrators or Assigns, or any other person or persons, claiming or pretending to have, or claim any right, title, property of Interest therein by his or their means, consent or Procurement. In Witness whereof he the said Henry Collins hath hereunto set his hand and seal, the day and year first above written."

2. Date or erection: 1748-1749

3. Architect: Peter Harrison
4. Builder or contractor: Wing Spooner, Samuel Green, Thomas Melvil, and Israel Chapman, House Carpenters
5. Original plans: None known
6. Alterations and additions: The first alteration of the building took place in 1858-1859, designed by George Snell, Boston architect, and built by Abraham T. Peckham, contractor. The north and south wings were extended. A square room was added to the east end of the building. The dimensions of this room were determined by swinging the east wall into position as the south wall of the new room. This wall was duplicated on the north side and a new brick wall was built for the east end. A wide doorway with a semi-circular fan arch above, separated the new room from the older portion of the structure. In 1875, George C. Mason designed the second addition of the building, now used as the delivery room. The third addition was a fireproof stack area designed by John Du Fais in 1912. Norman Isham worked on the interior restoration from 1912-1931. From 1932-1935, John Russell Pope worked on the landscaping of the grounds. In 1940, the present offices designed by Wyeth and King were added to the building. The last addition, presently under construction, is an underground vault at the east end designed by Albert Harkness and Peter Geddes.

Consideration of additions was undertaken by the Committee on Enlargement as recorded in Annals of the Redwood Library and Athenaeum, Newport, R.I., 1891. This committee was established May 8, 1865, with the following members: Rev. Charles T. Brooks, George C. Mason, William P. Sheffield, and Augustus N. Littlefield. Various plans were submitted including those by George C. Mason, the Newport architect, George A. Hammett, and Richard Morris Hunt. Hunt, having been engaged by the Committee, presented his plans September 14, 1868. "First, to erect upon the Library lot at the southeast corner of the reading room joined thereto, and in harmony with the architecture, a building of solid material and of ample dimensions, for the purposes of a gallery for pictures, statuary, and other works of art, followed hereafter by successive additions, to be proceeded with as the means of the Company and its ability to so appropriate them are increased, until an entirely new and enlarged structure of stone and marble shall take the place of the existing wooden structure. The plans are hereby submitted, with a statement of the probable cost of the initiatory building; which, constructed with a

white marble front, and with side and rear walls of brick, the architect estimates at about twelve thousand dollars." (See Mason, George C., Annals of the Redwood Library and Athenaeum, Newport, R.I., Newport, R.I.: Redwood Library, 1891, pp. 247, 249, 253, 269, 271.) The above plans were never built. In 1875, Mason proceeded with his addition.

7. Important old views and descriptions:

- a. Old views: Drawing of view from the southwest, by Eugene Pierre du Simitiere, 1768. The Library Company of Philadelphia.  
Engraving of the original building, view from the northwest, drawn by James Stevens, engraved by W.D. Terry of Newport, dated before 1858. Redwood Library.  
View from the northwest, by W. Waud and C.H. Hayes, Sr., dated after 1858. Redwood Library.  
Photograph of the facade showing balustrade atop the central room
- b. Descriptions: Contract: Erection of Library Building.

"Articles of Agreement Indented made and concluded upon the ninth Day of August in the twenty-second year of his Majesty's Reign. George the second, King of Great Britain etc. Anno Dominie One Thousand seven Hundred and forty-eight, Between Wing Spooner, Samuel Green, Thomas Melvil and Israel Chapman, all of Newport, in the County of Newport and Colony of Rhode Island, House Carpenters, of the One Part, and Samuel Wickham, Esq., Henry Collins and John Tillinghast, Merchants, all of Newport aforesaid, Three of the Directors of the Redwood Library in Newport, aforesaid, of the other part: Witness, That the said Wing Spooner, Samuel Green, Thomas Melvil and Israel Chapman, Do Hereby Covenant, Promise and Engage to Erect and build in Newport aforesaid on the Lott of Land given by said Henry Collins for that purpose a House or Building to be called the Redwood Library, suitable and convenient for depositing therein a large number of books given by Abraham Redwood, Esq., for Public use: That is to say, to do and perform all the Carpenters and House joyners Work in and about said House of the following dimensions and in the manner hereinafter express'd, Viz: The large Room to be thirty-seven foot long, and twenty-six foot broad in the inside, and nineteen foot high. At the west End (which is the Principal Front) is to be a Portico of four Columns according to the Dorick Order, with a Pediment over it, with Pilasters to suit the Columns. The Projection of the Portico form the Out-

side of the Building to be about nine foot, and the Roof to be continued out so much as to form the Pediment: The length of the Columns to be about seventeen foot including Base and Capital, and the thickness of twenty-six inches just above the Base: The Building to be fram'd Brac'd and Studded the outside and Roof to be boarded with Feather edg'd Boards, the Shingles to be shav'd and joynted and to be laid: The outside to be covered with Pine Plank worked in Imitation of Rustick, and to have a Dorick Entablature with Triglipphs, etc. continued from the Portico quite Round the Building and to have a Plain Pediment at the East End. At the West end next to the Portico, to be two small Wings or Outshots for two Little Rooms or offices, one on each side and both alike in form and Bigness, each to be about twelve foot square and (with a small Break or Recess) to Range in a line Parallel to the West End of the Building or innerpart of the Portico. The Roofs of these Outshots to be slooping from the lower part of the Entablature so as to form a Kind of half Pediment on each Side of the Portico, with a Cornice only to be work'd around instead of the whole Entablature, the height of them to be about eleven foot at the outermost Side and seventeen foot at the Inner side or where they joyn the Body of the Building, and to be plank'd as the other in imitation of Rustick: in front of said Building to be four whole windows and two Attic windows, on each side four whole windows and three attic windows: In all twelve whole Windows and nine Attick Windows: The whole Windows to be six foot high and three foot wide, and the Attick Windows to be three foot square within the Frames, of which are to be red cedar and quite plain without any Architrave on the Outside. At the East end to have a Venetian Window only: To have three outside doors, Viz., One large One in the middle of the Portico, eight foot six Inches high and three foot nine inches wide, and two Small ones in the back part of the two Outshots, and to have four Inside Doors, to consist of eight Pannels each and cas'd with Double Architrave. The Sides and Ends of the Great Room within to be furr'd out and even with the Posts, and the ceiling to be furr'd out with a small Cove next the Walls about two foot Downwards at the Bottom of which over the Attick Windows an Ionick Cornice to run quite round: To be wainscotted about five foot high from the floor quite round the great Room: The jambs of the Windows to be wainscotted With Architraves round and Seats in the lower Windows: within Great Door which is the entrance from the Portico a small [obliterated] is to be partitioned off for a Porch with a door on the inside and therein to erect a small Plain Stair Case,

to go up to the Roof of the Building. The Floors to be laid with Plank Rabbitted or with Double Boards. About four foot from the Walls or Sides of the Great Room must be a sort of Partition erected about ten feet high, with openings over against each window, on both Sides of which must be placed Shelves for the Books; there must also be five or six Desks for laying the Books on in convenient Places, and the whole to be finished and compleated well and workmanlike according to a Plan or Draught drawn by Mr. Joseph Harrison, and agreed on for that Purpose, on or before the last Day of October, which will be in the year of our Lord One Thousand Seven Hundred and forty-nine. For and in Consideration whereof the said Samuel Wickham, Henry Collins and John Tillinghast Do hereby Covenant, Promise and Engage to pay or cause to be paid to the said Wing Spooner, Samuel Green, Thomas Melvil and Israel Chapman for said Work the Sum of two Thousand and two Hundred pounds in good and passable Bills of Publik Credit of said Colony, old Tenor; Six Hundred pounds thereof when the Roof is shingled, and the Remainder when the Building is finished; and to find and provide for the carrying on and finishing said Building all the Stuff and materials needful and necessary as the same shall be wanted. And for the true performance of these Articles and every clause thereof, the said Parties Bind themselves each to the other joyntly and severally firmly by these presents in the penal sum of Four Thousand Pounds, Current passable Bills of Public Credit of said Colony, old Tenor, to be forfeited and paid by the Party failing the other Party.

In Witness whereof, the Parties to these presents have hereunto interchangeably Set their hands and Seals the Day and year first above written."

Articles: For Building the Library.

"Memorandum: That the Parties to the within written Articles of Agreement, notwithstanding what is therein written, Do hereby agree to the following alterations in that building therein mentioned upon the same penalty as within, viz., that the four Pilasters in the front of the House, all the windows in the north and South West of said House: the stair case and Partitions within side, the Venitian Window in the East End, and the wainscott on the north and south Side within the House, as far as the Shelves extend be all omitted, and that instead of the Venitian Window in the East end, there be three small Windows, that the Shelves for the Books



be placed against the Walls of the Building, that there be a stair case at the west end of said House, and Ceiling of the Portico to have a cornice and that the Plans-hear and Entablature and all other Parts of said Building be finished and compleated well and workmanlike agreeable to a plan or Draught drawn by Mr. Peter Harrison, and all Parts of the within mentioned Articles of agreement to stand good excepting such alterations as are made by this Additional agreement, And in Consideration of the Builders Conforming to ye said Draught drawn by Mr. Peter Harrison, and following his directions as to all the Alterations herein mentioned and all other parts of said Building according to the true intent and meaning of said Articles, the within named Saml Wickham, Henry Collins and John Tillinghast Do hereby Oblige themselves to pay to the within-named Wing Spooner, Samuel Green, Thomas Melvil and Israel Chapman, the Sum of One Hundred pounds, old Tenor, over and above the two Thousand two hundred pounds within mentioned.

In Witness whereof the Parties to these Presents have interchangeably set their hands and seals the Sixth Day of February in the twenty second year of his Majty's Reign Anno Dominie 1748."

8. Measured drawings:

The following collection of measured drawings is located in the Newport Historical Society, Vault A. All drawings are from the office of Norman M. Ishman, unless otherwise indicated.

February 14, 1914

- a. Report upon the present condition and future development of the Redwood Library

February 23, 1914 [?]

- b. Sketch of proposed addition and alterations.  
blue print

February 25, 1914

- c. West elevation and section.  
ink on linen [HABS photocopy]
- d. West elevation and section.  
black print
- e. Longitudinal section.  
ink on linen [HABS photocopy]
- f. Longitudinal section.  
black print

- g. Side elevation.  
ink on linen [HABS photocopy]
- h. Side elevation.  
black print
- i. Side elevation.  
blueprint
- j. Basement plan.  
ink on linen [HABS photocopy]
- k. Basement plan.  
black print
- l. Basement plan.  
blueprint
- m. First floor plan.  
ink on linen [HABS photocopy]
- n. First floor plan.  
black print
- o. First floor plan.  
blueprint

May 29, 1914

- p. Drawing No. 2: North side of room.  
ink on linen

June 2, 1914

- q. Drawing No. 3: East side of room.  
ink on linen

June 3, 1914

- r. Drawing No. 1: New finish in Redwood Library  
ink on linen

June 5, 1914

- s. Drawing No. 4: South side of room.  
ink on linen
- t. Drawing No. -: West side of room.  
ink on linen

June 10, 1914

- u. Book of specifications for mason work, plastering, etc.

June 10, 1912

- v. Drawing No. 12: Details of cupola, Redwood Library.  
pencil on tracing paper

June, 1914

- w. Book of cabinet work specifications.
- x. Book of measurements and sketches.

August 3, 1914

y. Drawing No. 11: Ironwork of ceiling light.  
ink on linen

August 29, 1914

z. Drawing No. 18: Ceiling light and plaster beams.  
ink on tracing paper

January 1, 1915

aa. Drawing No. 29: Room at Redwood Library.  
ink on linen

February 4, 1915

bb. Drawing No. 33: Passageway in Redwood Library.  
ink on linen

February 5, 1915

cc. Drawing No. 35: Detail of doors in passageway  
ink on linen

No date

dd. Ink and pencil detail of window in the Summer House  
at Redwood Library.

December 18, 1916

ee. Drawing No. -: New sash and door for Summer House, final  
of above drawing dd.

September 1, 1927

ff. Report on the examination of Redwood Library, by  
F.M. Goodwin.

November 11, 1930

gg. Drawing No. -: Elevation of room wall.  
pencil on tracing paper

March 2, 1931

hh. Steel for support of present roof - James H. Tower  
Ironworks.  
blueprint  
for Mr. John Kelley

March 13, 1931

ii. Blueprint of steelwork for support of roof, made for  
John J. Kelley.

March 24, 1931

jj. New finish in Redwood Library - plan.  
ink on linen

kk. New finish in Redwood Library - West side.  
ink on linen

- ll. New finish in Redwood Library - East side.  
ink on linen
- mm. New finish in Redwood Library - End elevation.  
ink on linen
- nn. Drawing No. 5: Finish in Redwood Library.  
pencil on tracing paper

March 31, 1931

- oo. Drawing No. 7: Section through cornice.  
pencil on tracing paper

April 4, 1931

- pp. Drawing No. 6: Section through door and brackets.  
pencil on tracing paper

April 6, 1931

- qq. Drawing No. 8: Full size of finish in Redwood Library.  
pencil on tracing paper

April 20, 1931

- rr. Drawing No. 9: Sash, Redwood Library.  
pencil on tracing paper

No date [ca. 1930]

- ss. Black and red ink rendering of grounds.  
on linen

November 5, 1932

- tt. Suggested treatment of grounds - The Redwood Library.  
tinted photocopy  
John Russell Pope, architect

January 6, 1935

- uu. Suggested treatment of grounds - The Redwood Library,  
revised.  
blueprint  
John Russell Pope, architect

October 8, 1940

- vv. Elevation of addition.  
blueprint  
Wyeth and King, architects
- ww. Plans and interior elevations.  
blueprint  
Wyeth and King, architects
- xx. Same as above, but labelled "Scheme C".  
blueprint  
Wyeth and King, architects

February 26, 1949

- yy. Alterations and Additions: Heating and Ventilation System - Basement plan.  
blueprint  
Alfred Y. Christie, engineer.
- zz. Alterations and Additions: Heating and Ventilation System - First floor plan.  
blueprint  
Alfred Y. Christie, engineer.

No date

- aaa. Enlarged section of cupola.  
black on white
  - bbb. Enlarged section of reading room.  
black on white
9. Architectural books in the inventory of Peter Harrison: From Bridenbaugh, Carl, Peter Harrison, First American Architect, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1949. Appendix C, pp. 168-70.

"This list of books on architecture and construction is taken from the inventory of Harrison's personal property made at New Haven on June 28, 1775, and includes all the works he is known to have used except Batty Langley's Treasury of Designs, which he must at one time have possessed. Perhaps it was left behind at Newport..."

James Gibbs, A Book of Architecture, containing designs of buildings and ornaments (London, 1728).

Abraham Swan, A Collection of Designs in architecture (2 vols., London, 1757).

Abraham Swan, The British Architect: or, the builder's treasury of staircases (London, 1745).

Isaac Ware, A Complete Body of Architecture (2 vols., London, 1756).

James Gibbs, Rules for drawing the several parts of architecture (London, 1732).

Inigo Jones, The designs of Inigo Jones, consisting of plans and elevations for public and private buildings, Published by William Kent, with additional designs... (2 vols., London, 1727).

Isaac Ware, William Kent, and Thomas Ripley, The Plans...

of Houghton in Norfolk, ... Delineated by I. Ware and W. Kent (London, 1735).

Abraham Swan, Designs in Carpentry (London, 1759).

Robert Morris, In defence of ancient architecture (1728).

William Halfpenny, Practical Architecture (London, 1724).  
The Art of Sound Building (London, 1725); A New and Complete System of Architecture (London, 1749); Useful Architecture (London, 1751); Rural Architecture (London, 1752); The Modern Builder's Assistant (London, 1752); New Designs for Chinese Temples (London, 1750-52).

William Pain, Builder's Companion (London, 1759).

John Evelyn (translator). Freart de Chambray's Parallel of the ancient architecture with the modern (London, 1707).

H. Copland, A New Book of Ornaments by H. Copland (London, 1746).

William Salmon, Palladio Londinensis, or, the London Art of Building (London, 1734).

Sebastien Le Clerc, A Treatise of Architecture, (2 vols., London, 1732).

Robert Morris, Select Architecture (London, 1757).

Thomas C. Overton, Original designs of temples and other ornamental buildings... (London, 1766).

Art of Drawing (There were several works with this title issued in the eighteenth century.)

Robert Morris, Select Architecture (London, 1757).

John Gwyn, An essay upon Harmony as it relates chiefly to situation and building (London, 1739).

Edward Hoppus, Andrea Palladio's Architecture in four books, ... revis'd... by E. Hoppus (2 vols., London, 1735, 1736).

Sebastian Le Clerc, Les vrais principes du desseins suivis du Caractere des Passions (Paris, 1680).

Isaac Ware, Designs of Inigo Jones and others (London, 1735).

- B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure:  
Redwood Library was the outgrowth of the Philosophical Club which had been organized under the title of "The Society for the Promotion of Knowledge and Virtue by a Free Conversation". The membership and history of the Library is a record of events and personages important in the history of Newport.
- C. Sources of Information:
1. Primary and unpublished sources:  
Records of Deeds in Newport City Hall.  
Measured drawings in Vault A of the Newport Historical Society.  
Charles H. Russell Scrapbook (1796-1884), Vol. 1, p. 116, and Vol. VI, p. 85, in Vault A of the Newport Historical Society.  
Charles H. Richardson Scrapbooks (numbers 97D, 971, and 972), in Vault A of the Newport Historical Society.
  2. Secondary and published sources:  
Newport Mercury, December 4, 1858.  
Kimball, Fiske, "The Colonial Amateurs and Their Models: Peter Harrison," Architecture, LIII (June, 1926), 155-209.  
Bridenbaugh, Carl, Peter Harrison, First American Architect, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1949.  
Downing, Antoinette Forrester, Early Homes of Rhode Island, Richmond, Virginia: Garrett and Massie, Inc., 1937.  
Downing, Antoinette F. and Scully, Vincent J. Jr., The Architectural Heritage of Newport, Rhode Island, New York: Clarkson N. Potter, second edition, 1967.  
King, David, An Historical Sketch of the Redwood Library and Athenaeum, in Newport, Rhode Island, Boston: John Wilson and Son, 1860.  
Mason, George Champlin, Annals of the Redwood Library and Athenaeum, Newport, Rhode Island, Newport: Redwood Library, 1891.
  3. Likely sources not yet investigated:  
Newport Diaries in the Newport Historical Society.

Prepared by Thomas M. Slade  
University of Notre Dame  
Project Historian  
August, 1970.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: An important work of the architect Peter Harrison, it is a key building in the introduction of English Georgian architecture to America.
2. Condition of fabric: The building is in excellent condition.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: Original reading room 37 feet by 26 feet with a 19 foot ceiling, 12 foot square rooms to either side in line with front wall of the reading room, Doric portico to the west; five bay west front; one story with basement. Later additions follow the axis of the original building to the rear, or east, in a series of rectangular units. The first addition was a reading room 25-1/2 feet by 50 feet and the filling in of the reentrant angles of the original side wings. The second addition was the large rectangular central room with smaller projecting rooms to the north and south. The fireproof rectangular stack was the third addition. The fourth addition was the enlargement of the second addition to the south for increased office space. The last addition, presently under construction, is an underground vault at the east end of the building.
2. Foundations: The foundations are masonry with regular ashlar facing and quoined corners.
3. Wall construction: The original front portion of the building is pine plank finished to simulate rusticated ashlar. The paint, a gray-brown stone color, is mixed with sand to imitate the surface texture of stone. The rear portions of the building have been stuccoed to match the wooden front.
4. Structural system, framing: The original building and the north and south walls of the first addition are frame. The east wall of the first addition was constructed of brick. The later additions are of fireproof construction.
5. Chimneys: There are two brick chimneys built into the wall separating the first and second additions.
6. Openings:
  - a. Doorways: The original entrance on the portico has an eight panel door. The molded doorway has a cornice



and carved frieze. Harrison's source for the design of the doorway would seem to have been Kent, Designs of Inigo Jones, (1727), Vol. I, plate 55.

- b. Windows: The windows of the west facade are double hung with twelve light sashes. The drawing made by Eugene Pierre du Simitiere, 1768, in the Du Simitiere Collection, The Library Company of Philadelphia, indicates that the original windows had nine light sashes. A Palladian window under a large relieving arch was used on the original east wall of the library, now the south wall of the first addition. First introduced in England by Webb's Whitehall designs, this motif was illustrated in Kent's Designs of Inigo Jones, (1727), Vol. I, plate 73. Although this example employed the Corinthian Order, the headpiece to Second Book, Hoppus' Palladio, (1735) illustrates the Ionic Order.
7. Roof: The slate covered gable roofs originally had wood shingles. The full Doric entablature on the upper cornice of the original building was continued on the additions. A simpler molded cornice without an architrave was used on the lower side wings. Three cupolas have been added to light the additions.
8. Porches, stoops, and bulkheads: The four column Doric entrance porch has a full entablature and an undecorated pediment. The design was based on one of Lord Burlington's small garden temples at Chiswick published as the headpiece to Fourth Book in Hoppus' Palladio, (1735).

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plan: The building is a series of different sized rectangles arranged along an east-west axis. The main entrance at the west opens into the original reading room. Access to the delivery room, the working center of the library, is from either the present reading room at the west or from the exterior entrance on the north. The stack area is east of the delivery room.
2. Stairways: There are no decorative stairways. In the northwest corner of the building is a stairway to the basement rooms. There are metal stairways in the stack area.
3. Flooring: The original portion of the building has wide board floors. There are narrow hardwood floors in the additions.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: All walls and ceilings are plaster. There are decorative wood cornices and ceiling moldings in all rooms.
5. Doorways and doors: The original portion of the building has eight panel doors set in lightly molded doorways. A large two leaf sliding door separates the original and present reading rooms. A heavy two leaf panelled door separates the delivery room from the reading room. Directly opposite a similar door separates the delivery room from the stack area. These two doors are set in elaborately molded doorways with bracketed cornices.
6. Special decorative features: The original reading room has restored bookcases. A circular skylight in the original portion replaced a saucer dome. The interior decoration was inspired by Batty Langley's Treasury of Design, (1745).
7. Hardware: No original hardware remains.
8. Lighting: There are modern fixtures throughout.
9. Heating: There is a modern heating system.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The Library is located on a large, level corner lot facing west. There is a garden to the south.
2. Historic landscape design: There is a pleasant garden with formal pathways and informal groupings of trees and shrubs, designed by John Russell Pope.
3. Outbuildings: The Abraham Redwood Garden House (HABS No. RI-274) is located at the southeast corner of the grounds. Built in 1766, it is attributed to Peter Harrison. The wrought iron gates from Abraham Redwood's estate are now installed in the fence on the north side of the property.
4. Walks: A cast of the Houdon statue of George Washington stands in the center of the walk from Bellevue Avenue.

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

Newport HABS Project -- 1970. Sponsored in cooperation with the Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, Antoinette F. Downing, Chairman. Under the direction of James C. Massey, Chief

of HABS, and Osmund Overby, (University of Missouri), Project Supervisor, Cervin Robinson, photographer. Edited and expanded in 1971 by Thomas M. Slade, (University of Notre Dame), Architectural Historian, Susan R. Slade, historian.